Eddie Izzard

Edward John Izzard (/ˈɪzɑːrd/; born 7 February 1962) is an English stand-up comedian, actor, writer, and political activist. His comedic style takes the form of rambling whimsical monologue and self-referential pantomime. He had a starring role in the television series *The Riches* as Wayne Malloy and has appeared in films such as *Ocean's Twelve*, *Ocean's Thirteen*, *Mystery Men*, *Shadow of the Vampire*, *The Cat's Meow*, *Across the Universe*, *Valkyrie* and *Victoria & Abdul*. He has also worked as a voice actor in *The Wild*, *Igor*, *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, *Cars 2*, and *The Lego Batman Movie*.

Izzard has cited his main comedy role model as Monty Python, and Python's John Cleese once referred to him as the "Lost Python".[1] In 2009, he completed 43 marathons in 51 days for Sport Relief despite having no prior history of long-distance running.[2] He has won numerous awards including a Primetime Emmy Award for Individual Performance in a Variety or Music Program for his comedy special *Dress to Kill*, in 2000. Izzard's website won the Yahoo People's Choice Award[3] and earned the Webby Award.[4] Izzard is openly "straight transvestite", having cross-dressed both on and offstage.[5][6]

Izzard has campaigned for various causes and has been a Labour Party activist for most of his life. He twice attempted to be elected for a seat on Labour's National Executive Committee. When Christine Shawcroft resigned in March 2018, he automatically took her place.

Eddie Izzard

Izzard in April 2015

Born	Edward John Izzard 7 February 1962 Colony of Aden
Residence	Victoria, London, England
Comedy career	
Years active	1982–present
Genres	Surreal humour · improvisational comedy · observational comedy · physical comedy

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Early life

Edward John Izzard[7] was born on 7 February 1962 in the Colony of Aden,[8] the younger son of English parents Dorothy Ella and Harold John Michael Izzard. The family name is of French Huguenot origin.[9] His mother was a midwife and nurse, while his father was an accountant who was working in Aden with British Petroleum at the time of Izzard's birth.[10][11] When Izzard was one year old, the family moved to Northern Ireland, settling in Bangor, County Down, where they lived there until Izzard was five.[1][7][8][10] The family then moved to Wales, where they lived in Skewen, West Glamorgan. Izzard's mother died of cancer when Izzard was six and his brother, Mark, was eight.[7][11][12] He and his brother built a model railway to occupy their time while their mother was ill (it was donated to Bexhill Museum in 2016).[13] Following his mother's death, Izzard attended boarding schools[7][11] such as St John's School in Porthcawl, Mid Glamorgan,[14] as well as St Bede's Prep School[15] and Eastbourne College.[16] He said that he knew he was a transgender person[17] at the age of four, after watching another boy being forced to wear a dress by his sisters, and knew he wanted to be an actor at the age of seven.[18]

Career

Comedy

Izzard began to toy with comedy at the University of Sheffield, with student friend Rob Ballard.[19][20] After leaving his accountancy degree course, he and Ballard took their act to the streets,[19][20] often in Covent Garden.[14][21][22] After his split with Ballard, Izzard spent a great deal of the early 1980s working as a street performer in Europe and the United States. Izzard says that he developed his comedic voice by talking to his audience while doing solo escape acts after splitting with Ballard.[23] He then moved his act into the stand-up comedy venues of Britain. His first gig was at the Banana Cabaret in Balham, London.[7][24]

Izzard in 2008

In 1987, he made his first stage appearance at the Comedy Store in London.[1] He refined his material throughout the 1980s, and in the early 1990s he finally began earning some measure of recognition through his improvisation, in part at his own club "Raging Bull" in Soho.[22]

Izzard's big break came in 1991 when he performed his 'Raised by Wolves' sketch on the televised 'Hysteria 3' AIDS benefit.[25]

Izzard speaks French and has performed stand-up shows in the language; from 2014 he began to perform in German, Spanish, Russian and Arabic,[26] all languages that he did not previously speak.[27]

Theatrical, TV and film appearances

In 1994, Izzard made his West End drama debut as the lead in the world premiere of David Mamet's *The Cryptogram* with Lindsay Duncan, in the production at London's Comedy Theatre. The success of that role led to his second starring role in David Beaird's black comedy *900 Oneonta*. In 1995, he portrayed the title character in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*.[28]

In 1998 Izzard appeared briefly on stage with the Monty Python team in *The American Film Institute's Tribute to Monty Python* (also referred to as *Monty Python Live at Aspen*). He walked on stage with the five surviving Pythons and he was summarily escorted off by Eric Idle and Michael Palin as he attempted to participate in a discussion about how the group got together.[29] He has appeared in a number of episodes of BBC 1's Have I Got News For You.

Izzard portrayed comedian Lenny Bruce in the 1999 production of Julian Barry's 1971 play *Lenny*. In 2001, he replaced Clive Owen in Peter Nichols' 1967 play *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* at the Comedy Theatre. Izzard and Victoria Hamilton then repeated their lead roles when the show was brought to Broadway in 2003, with the Roundabout Theatre Company production. The revival received four Tony Award nominations including Best Revival of a Play, Best Leading Actor and Actress for its stars Izzard and Hamilton in their Broadway debuts, and Best Direction for Laurence Boswell. In June 2010, Izzard replaced James Spader in the role of Jack Lawson in David Mamet's play *Race* on Broadway.[30]

Izzard at the 2013 British Academy Awards

Izzard has appeared in numerous films, starting with 1996's *The Secret Agent*. He has appeared as several real-life individuals, including Charlie Chaplin in *The Cat's Meow*, actor Gustav von Wangenheim in *Shadow of the Vampire* and General Erich Fellgiebel in *Valkyrie*. Other roles have included Mr. Kite in *Across the Universe*, Lussurioso in *Revengers Tragedy* and criminal expert Roman Nagel in *Ocean's Twelve* and *Ocean's Thirteen*. Voice work has included the titular It in *Five Children and It*, Nigel in *The Wild* and the mouse warrior Reepicheep in *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*. He said in 2009 that he would not be reprising his role as Reepicheep and the role was ultimately played by Simon Pegg in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. He has stated he felt he learnt to act whilst working on the film *Circus*.[31]

Izzard appeared in the 2009 BBC science fiction miniseries *The Day of the Triffids* based on the 1951 novel, alongside Jason Priestley, Vanessa Redgrave, Joely Richardson, Dougray Scott and Brian Cox.[32]

Izzard presented the medals to the athletes who had won the 800m T54 race at the London 2012 Paralympic Games, including gold medalist David Weir.[33]

He played Dr. Hatteras, a sceptical psychology professor, in the Showtime series *United States of Tara*[34] and appeared in six episodes of the 2013–15 American psychological thriller–horror television series *Hannibal* as Dr. Abel Gideon.[35]

In June 2017 Izzard read extracts from his autobiography *Believe Me* for BBC Radio 4's *Book of the Week*.[36]

Eddie Izzard appeared as a guest on The Daily Show in May of 2019 and discussed his current activities as a comic, his political aspirations, and his ongoing efforts as an avid marathon runner.[37]

Comic style

Izzard uses a stream-of-consciousness delivery that jumps between topics. As he put it in a 2004 interview with *The Guardian*, "It's the oral tradition. Human beings have been doing it for thousands of years".[38] His bent towards the surreal even went so far as to produce a sitcom called *Cows* in 1997 for Channel 4, a live action comedy with actors dressed in cowsuits.[39]

Elliott Gould and Eddie Izzard in 2006

Political views and activism

Izzard has engaged in campaigning work. He is especially well known as a pro-European Union campaigner, supporting the further integration of the UK into the EU. In May 2005, he appeared on the BBC's political debate show *Question Time*, describing himself as a "British-European", comparing this with other cultural identities such as "African-American". As part of his integration campaigning, he was one of the first people to spend a euro in London. This pan-European approach has influenced his work; he regularly performs in French[21][34] and occasionally in German.[22] On 16 June 2017, on the "Overtime" segment of HBO political talk show *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Izzard claimed to be working in four languages Spanish, German, French and English.

In July 2003, Izzard received an honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of East Anglia, Norwich, for "pro-Europe campaigning", "his contribution to promoting modern languages and tolerance of other cultures and lifestyles", and for having "transcended national barriers" with his humour.[40] He has also campaigned unsuccessfully against the closure of the departments of Drama and Languages, Linguistics and Translation at the University of East Anglia, although the department of Drama was later reprieved.[41]

In 1998, Izzard was named in a list of the biggest private financial donors to the Labour Party.[42] He appeared in a party political broadcast for the Labour Party in the run-up to the 2005 general election. He donated nearly £10,000 to the party in 2008,[43] appeared again in a party political broadcast for the 2009 European election, and again in a 2010 election video entitled *Brilliant Britain*. Izzard appeared in literature to support changing the British electoral system from first-past-the-post to alternative vote for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons in the Alternative Vote referendum in 2011.[44] In 2011, Izzard revealed that he had political ambitions and wanted to become an MP, Mayor, or MEP by 2020.[45] On 25 February 2016, Izzard announced his intention to stand for the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party.[46] It was announced on 9 August 2016 that Izzard had failed to be elected to the NEC.[47]

On 20 July 2006, he received an honorary doctorate in Letters from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sheffield,[48] where he spent one year on an Accounting and Financial Management course in the early 1980s. During his time at the university he established the now-defunct Alternative Productions Society in the Union of Students with the aim of promoting fringe-based arts. On 4 March 2010, he was elected as the Honorary President of the University of Sheffield Students' Union.[49]

On 7 July 2007, Izzard was one of the presenters from the London leg of Live Earth. During an interview for the 2008 *Stripped* tour, he spoke about becoming more active in European politics as well as running for political office in Europe within the next decade. Izzard added a stop in New Orleans during his 2008 *Stripped* tour. All proceeds from the performance of 23 June 2008 were donated to Neighbourhood Housing Services of New Orleans.[50]

In March 2014, Izzard began leading a campaign encouraging Scottish people not to vote for independence in the September referendum, saying that England would feel a "deep sense of loss" if Scotland were to leave the UK.[51]

Izzard is an outspoken supporter of the Labour Party. In September 2011, he declared his ambition to stand for the party in the future as an MP, MEP, or Mayor of London,[52] announcing an intention to stand for the London mayoral election in 2020.[53][54] When asked on comedy panel show *The Last Leg* why he thought he might be elected, he replied "Boris Johnson".[55] He is also a republican, believing that Britain should have a democratically elected head of state.[56] He has stated that he is a social democrat, not a socialist.[57]

Izzard confirmed his support for Labour in the 2015 general election, attending a party rally with fellow comedian Ben Elton and actress Sally Lindsay in April 2015.[58]

On 27 July 2009, with only 5 weeks' training and no significant prior running experience, Izzard began seven weeks of back-to-back marathon runs (with Sundays off) across the UK to raise money for Sport Relief. He ran from London to Cardiff to Belfast to Edinburgh and back to London, carrying the flag of the country — England, Scotland, or Wales — in which he was running. In Northern Ireland he carried a self-designed green flag bearing a white dove. The blog *Eddie Iz Running* documented his 43 marathons in 51 days, covering at least 27 miles per day (totaling more than 1,100 miles), ending on 15 September 2009.[59] He received a special award at BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 2009 for his achievements.[60] In March 2010, Izzard took part in the Sport Relief Mile event.[61]

On 16 February 2016 the BBC announced that Izzard would attempt to run 27 marathons in 27 days, through South Africa for Sport Relief.[62] The significance of the number 27 came from the number of years spent in prison by Nelson Mandela. In total Izzard would aim to run more than 700 miles, in temperatures of up to 40 °C. Izzard completed his first marathon on 23 February. He attempted such a project in South Africa in 2012, but withdrew with health concerns.[63] He completed the marathon challenge on 20 March, at the statue of Mandela in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Because he had spent one day in hospital, he had to run two consecutive marathons on this last day. He raised more than £1.35M for Sport Relief.[64] A BBC documentary, detailing his feat, was broadcast on 28 March.[65]

In May 2017, Izzard declared his intention to become a Labour politician after endorsing Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn in the 2017 UK general election He said: "I like Jeremy Corbyn. He believes in what he says."[66] In October, he announced a renewed bid for election to Labour's National Executive Committee.[67] In January 2018, it was announced that Izzard had failed in his second bid to be elected to the NEC.[68] On 31 March 2018, Christine Shawcroft resigned from the Labour Party's NEC. Izzard automatically replaced her and served until the next NEC election, held in summer 2018.[69] Izzard came 9th in that election and so was not re-elected to the NEC.[70]

Personal life

Izzard resides in Victoria, London.[71]

During his 2008 *Stripped* tour, Izzard said he realised he was an atheist. He said, "I was warming the material up in New York, where one night, literally on stage, I realised I didn't believe in God at all. I just didn't think there was anyone upstairs."[72] He has since described himself as a spiritual atheist, saying, "I don't believe in the guy upstairs, I believe in us."[73]

Izzard keeps his romantic life private, citing the wishes of his companions not wanting to become content for his show.[72] He dated Sarah Townsend, who later directed the documentary *Believe: The Eddie Izzard Story*,[21] and whom he first met while she was running a Fringe venue at the Edinburgh Festival in 1989.[74]

Izzard supports Crystal Palace FC and became an associate director at the club on 16 July 2012.[75]

Izzard started to freely talk about his transvestism in venues such as the Edinburgh Festival as early as 1992.[5][6] His stance is that cross-dressing is neither part of his performance nor a sexual fetish.[76] He remarks in his show *Unrepeatable* that "women wear what they want and so do I". According to Izzard, "Most transvestites fancy women."[77] He calls himself "a straight transvestite, or male lesbian".[78] He has also said he is "a lesbian trapped in a man's body",[79] transgender,[5][80] and "a complete boy plus half girl".[78] He has expressed a belief that being transgender is caused by genetics and that someday this will be scientifically proven, having gone so far as to have his own genome sequenced.[81]

Honours

On 18 March 2007, Izzard was listed as number 3 of the 100 Greatest British National Comedians (behind Peter Kay at number 2 and Billy Connolly at number 1) as part of British television station Channel 4's ongoing *100 Greatest...*, series. In the 2010 updated version of the list he was ranked 5th.[82]

In 2012, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Sunderland.[83]

On 20 February 2013, Izzard received the 6th Annual Outstanding Lifetime Achievement Award in Cultural Humanism[84][85] — an award presented at Harvard University each year by the Humanist Community at Harvard,[86] the American Humanist Association, and the Harvard Community of Humanists, Atheists, and Agnostics.

In 2015 Izzard was chosen, by readers of *The Guardian*, as their 2014 public language champion. The award was announced in central London, at the Guardian and British Academy 2014 Schools Language Awards, as part of the annual Language Festival.[87]

On 20 November 2018 he was awarded a Honorary Doctorate of Letters (D.Litt) from York St John University.[88]

Books

- *Believe Me: A Memoir of Love, Death and Jazz Chickens* (2017), Michael Joseph, ISBN 978-0718181727.[89]

Discography

Date	Title
15 November 1993	*Live at the Ambassadors*
14 March 1994	*Unrepeatable*
21 October 1996	*Definite Article*
17 November 1997	*Glorious*
9 November 1998	*Dress to Kill*
18 November 2002	*Circle*
26 November 2003	*Sexie*
23 November 2009	*Stripped*
15 January 2011	*Live at Madison Square Garden*[90]
18 November 2013	*Force Majeure*

Filmography

Film

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1995	*The Oncoming Storm*	Luthor Keeton	
1996	*The Secret Agent*	Vladimir	
1998	*Velvet Goldmine*	Jerry Devine	
1998	*The Avengers*	Bailey	
1999	*Mystery Men*	Tony P	
1999	*The Criminal*	Peter Hume	
2000	*Circus*	Troy	
2000	*Shadow of the Vampire*	Gustav von Wangenheim	
2001	*The Cat's Meow*	Charlie Chaplin	
2001	*All the Queen's Men*	Tony Parker	
2002	*Revengers Tragedy*	Lussurioso	
2003	*Alien Invasion*	Brik	
2004	*Blueberry*	Prosit	
2004	*Five Children and It*	It (voice)	
2004	*Romance & Cigarettes*	Gene Vincent	
2004	*Ocean's Twelve*	Roman Nagel	
2005	*The Aristocrats*	Himself	Documentary
2006	*The Wild*	Nigel (voice)	
2006	*My Super Ex-Girlfriend*	Professor Bedlam	
2007	*Ocean's Thirteen*	Roman Nagel	
2007	*Across the Universe*	Mr. Kite	
2008	*The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*	Reepicheep (voice)	
2008	*Igor*	Dr. Schadenfreude (voice)	
2008	*Valkyrie*	Erich Fellgiebel	
2009	*Rage*	Tiny Diamonds	
2009	*Believe: The Eddie Izzard Story*	Himself	Documentary
2010	*Every Day*	Garrett	
2011	*The Other Side*	Dean Bellamy	
2011	*Cars 2*	Sir Miles Axelrod (voice)	
2011	*Lost Christmas*	Anthony	Also executive producer
2014	*Boychoir*	Drake	
2015	*Absolutely Anything*	Headmaster	
2015	*Day Out of Days*	Dag	
2016	*Whisky Galore!*	Captain Wagget	
2016	*Rock Dog*	Angus Scattergood (voice)	

2017	*The Lego Batman Movie*	Lord Voldemort (voice)	
2017	*Victoria & Abdul*	Bertie, Prince of Wales	
2019	*Six Minutes To Midnight*		Post-production; also writer

Television

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1991	*Barf Bites Back*	Himself	Television special
1994	*Open Fire*	Rich	Television film
1995	*Aristophanes: The Gods are Laughing*	Socrates	Television film
1996	*Tales from the Crypt*	Evans	Episode: "Confession"
1998	*Rex the Runt*	Melting Blob Man / Easter Island Head Aliens (voices)	2 episodes
1999	*Python Night – 30 Years of Monty Python*	Himself	Television special
2002	*Mongrel Nation*	Himself	Television documentary
2002	*A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*	Bri	Television film
2003	*40*	Ralph Outen	3 episodes
2006	*The Secret Policeman's Ball*	Himself	Television special
2007–2008	*The Riches*	Wayne Malloy / Doug Rich	20 episodes
2008	*The Secret Policeman's Ball*	Himself	Television special
2009	*The Day of the Triffids*	Torrence	2 episodes
2010	*Eddie Izzard: Marathon Man*	Himself	Television special
2010	*The Simpsons*	Nigel Bakerbutcher / Elizabeth II / Prince Charles (voices)	Episode: "To Surveil with Love"
2011	*United States of Tara*	Dr. Hattarras	8 episodes
2011	*The Good Wife*	James Thrush	Episode: "The Death Zone"
2012	*The Secret Policeman's Ball*	Himself	Television special
2012	*Treasure Island*	Long John Silver	Television miniseries
2012	*Bullet in the Face*	Johann Tannhäuser	6 episodes
2012	*Mockingbird Lane*	Grandpa	Television film
2013	*Meet the Izzards*	Himself	Two episode documentary
2013–2015	*Hannibal*	Dr. Abel Gideon	6 episodes
2014	*Castles in the Sky*	Robert Watson-Watt	Television film
2015	*Powers*	"Big Bad" Wolfe	10 episodes
2015	*The Devil You Know*	Thomas Putnam	Pilot

Theatre

- *900 Oneonta* (1994)
- *The Cryptogram* (1994)
- *Edward II* (1995)
- *Lenny* (1999)
- *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* (2001–2002, 2003)
- *Trumbo* (2003)
- *Race* (2010)

Video games

Year	Title	Voice role	Notes
2000	*102 Dalmatians: Puppies to the Rescue*	Sgt. Tibbs	
2011	*Cars 2*	Sir Miles Axlerod	

See also

- Cross-dressing in film and television

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- Eddie Izzard at AllMovie
- Interview with Izzard – *The Observer*, 3 October 2004
- *It's stupid and I love it – the Goon Show and me* – *The Guardian*, 14 February 2005.
- Izzard interviewed by Bono – *The Independent*, 16 May 2006
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